1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

are almost hereditary, learnt by son from father or uncle. Parents who have land afford their children no other opportunity but of working on it, and they endeavour to keep them on the farm.

Ali maintained that 'agriculture is the best occupation and the most dignified of all, an occupation which is worth while following. Apart from aliens, there is no man who is not a farmer, and no woman who is not a housekeeper and a cook. A man cooking or sewing or a woman ploughing or irrigating the land is something unheard of in our village. Indeed, one of the reasons for marriage is the fact that some of the tasks are performed only by a woman, and there must be a woman to do them as there always has been. Very few of our women have travelled by train, and if so, chiefly to visit relatives in town or shrines of saints, while a much greater number of men go to town on private or official visits.' This statement shows clearly the rigid sex-distribution in occupation. Furthermore, farming, especially one's own land, is the most esteemed occupation for men, and it is only necessity that forces others to be engaged in any other occupation.[1] This attitude of mind renders the possibility of establishing an industry or craft in the village very difficult. The prestige attached to the possession of land is very great. A wealthy merchant is not socially on par with a farm-owner. Farm-earnings are the most meritorious of all earnings; in other words, they are the surest of all 'halal' earnings—legitimately deserved and thus divinely approved. In farming, one is grappling directly with nature and getting the produce out of the soil's depths, depending on or contacting no other human beings, whom one might oppress or be oppressed by. One has only to sow the seeds and attend to them and God will look after the rest. The same attitude of 'halal' earnings applies to fishing, breeding cows or raising sheep, where the results solely depend on one's treatment and dealing with the object to be attended to. Thus, according to Ali, 'the evils of man are avoided'. This is certainly a fabricated religious justification or rationalization of the most secure source of livelihood in this rural society. The statement of my informant shows, however, the psychological anxiety that is bound up with economic insecurity, especially in ventures that entail any dealing with people or involving human contacts.

It is also significant that to acquire land through inheritance as distinguished from buying it, is to be stamped with the hallmark of prestige and prosperity. To be called 'heir to land' means good origin and good status in the village.

The reasons for the social importance of land and the emotional attachment to it are not difficult to seek. Economically speaking, land for generations has been the tangible bulwark against starvation and insecurity; it never fails to give reward for its cultivation, and thus it is a permanent property 'better than gold'. This analogy is derived from a well-known folk-tale about a father who had two sons, bequeathing to the favourite

[1] There appears to be no supporting evidence for this esteem either in folklore or in proverbs. There is nothing in the text of the Koran to that effect.

1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
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small landholders. Three decades ago, the head of one family owned about thirty acres, but after his death the land was divided into smaller plots between his inheritors. At present, apart from two outside landowners who possess about sixty acres in the village, and ten other villagers who each own more than five feddans, all the rest own less than five feddans. If the total arable land, estimated at 1350 acres, were distributed among the total population of 4450 people approximately, the *per capita* share would be little less than third of an acre (seven kirats) or 0·58 crop area *per capita*, which is slightly higher than the crop area *per capita* for the whole country, i.e. 0·46.[1] Moreover, the soil of the cultivable land in the village represents the average soil in the country, judging by its taxable power, which ranges from eighty to a hundred piastres.

At this juncture, it is relevant to mention that according to the Koranic law, at the death of man or woman, his or her property is shared by all the children of the deceased. We cannot go into the various details of the intricate Moslem law of inheritance, but shall refer to some of its significant principles. A female gets a share half that of the male. The inheritance should always be awarded to the 'asaba, the patrilineal line, however distant its members may be (apart from the wife, if she lives after her husband). The law recognizes the equivalence of siblings of the same sex, and it gives no privileges to primogeniture.

During the father's life, his children, whatever their age or status, have no legal right to own any of his property.[2] Whether to divide the land each attending to his share independently, or to keep it intact and farm it co-operatively, depends on the relationship between the heirs.[3] Many factors are involved, such as the existence of half-siblings (brothers or sisters by the father only), where the possibility of division is very great, on the relations of wives and in-laws, on the father's treatment of his children while alive, and so forth. If the land as the symbol of family unity is tilled co-operatively, the married sisters then get their land produce

[1] The 'crop area' unit is used instead of the acre because of the existence of the two systems of irrigation in various parts of the country, and hence the crop area gives a more accurate estimate of the cultivable land. For the whole country it is calculated that the land yields an average of a crop and a half per acre. For the whole country the population is 19,090,000, the cultivated area per acres, 5,585,300, and crop area 8,815,900 (Census 1947).

[2] See S. G. Fitzgerald, *Muhammadan Law*, London, 1931.

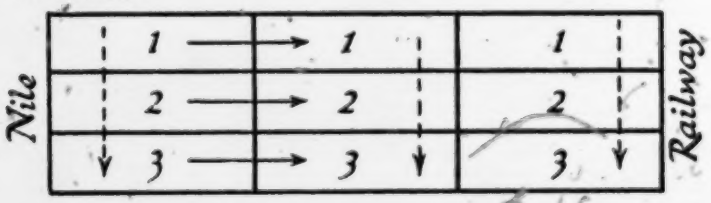
[3] The fear of division and perhaps the forgetting of one's name in the family has led some of the landowners to consecrate land, for all the members of his family of the patrilineal descent, which could not be owned separately, and should pass, as left, intact to the second generation and the third and so on. This type of land is called 'Wakf Ahli—family endowment', to differentiate it from Wakf Khairi—charitable endowment, consecrated for religious purposes and looked after by the Ministry of Charitable Endowments. The abuses in running these estates led the new regime that followed the abdication of ex-King Farouk to pass a law dissolving the charitable endowments (September 1952). According to this law these estates are to be distributed among the legal heirs as specified by the Islamic law of inheritance.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

according to their share as if they were renting it to their brothers. In cases of friction, the land is parcelled between the heirs, and boundaries are fixed; yet in the tax bill (wird) they are not divided and each has to pay his share of the tax, all being considered 'heirs of so and so'. This was originally a public demonstration of family unity. Lately, the separation of one's own land through official registration has been made an expensive task because of the fees required.

My informant, Mahmoud, told me that 'in these days, more often than not, heirs insist on dividing the land, and this occasions the hottest disputes between brothers, sisters and relatives. Law-suits over land have sometimes cost people the land itself, when they had to mortgage more and more parts of their land to establish their rights over another part. No one "yields a finger" in his share of his father's land; and above all, obstinacy and "the assertion of one's word" complicate the matter. Our life is mostly spent in setting my right and your right—hakki hakkak.'

The actual process of dividing the land is done lengthwise, from 'the sea to the mountain' as the villagers put it. The following diagram shows how it is done:



Suppose the above plot of land is to be divided equally between three brothers; each would receive a narrow plot extending lengthwise, in the direction of the lined arrow, and not breadthwise in the direction of the dotted arrow. The land stretches normally from the Nile to the railway station for more than a mile. It would be understandable that the villagers' division is better when the land varies in its fertility or ease of irrigation along that stretch. But this is always the practice, which involves more work in carrying fertilizer, and in irrigation. It also elongates the boundaries, thus providing more scope for breaking them and inviting trouble. The underlying notion behind this division, according to Mahmoud, is to share in every 'foot and finger' of the land that the father has bequeathed, irrespective of any other considerations, and hence there would be no difficulty in distributing the plots of land among the heirs. Such clinging to every bit of the father's land renders the mutual transference of land, for the sake of convenience, very difficult to achieve.

The main crops grown are wheat and barley in winter, and millet in summer. This applies practically to every farmer in the village, as these crops provide the basis of his subsistence. Before the perennial irrigation, one main crop in winter was the general produce, but now these two

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The poor woman was in great distress, and begged me to intercede for her. I spoke to the man about it, but the *feddān* of land proved to be too much of a temptation to him, and he accordingly obtained his divorce.[1] For some time after this he was ashamed to meet me, and always got out of my way when he knew I was coming to the village. However, his divorced wife was lucky enough to get another husband fairly quickly, and, moreover, one who was in an even better position than her former partner, whom dire vengeance has overtaken in the person of his new wife (Fig. 15). This woman is inordinately jealous, and if her wretched husband is a few minutes later in returning home from his work than she thinks he ought to be she flies into a passion and imagines that he has gone to see his former wife, or, rather, "to look upon her," as she puts it. For this reason she has, on more than one occasion, left his house and gone to her brother's, where she has remained for two or three days before her husband could by any means persuade her to return to him.

FIG. 15. HUSBAND AND JEALOUS WIFE

One day when I was visiting this man's village I was informed that his wife had again left him and remained in her brother's house for six days, because the man had gone to sell some of his *dura* (maize) to a customer living in the street in which his divorced wife now resides with her new husband. The jealous woman had returned to her husband's house only the evening before my visit! Her brother had warmly espoused her cause and told his sister's husband that in future he was not so much as to cast a look in the direction of his former wife!

[1] I think he obtained his divorce on the ground of her childlessness—see Chapter VI.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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THE FELLĀḤĪN OF UPPER EGYPT

when their petitioners are poor, will exercise their magic powers on behalf of the sufferers without exacting a fee.

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The *ʿafārīt* may appear of their own will to ordinary individuals, sometimes in human form, but more usually in the shape of an animal, such as a dog, a cat, or a donkey. Again, they may be seen by animals when invisible to man. Therefore when a donkey refuses to pass a certain spot in the desert or cultivation his rider knows that an *ʿafrīt* bars the way, and he usually has to dismount and forcibly lead his ass past the danger zone.[1]

E 791 776 588

Some magicians are supposed to be married to female *ʿafārīt*, and to have children by them. This is a belief to be found, not only in Egypt, but in other countries also. A man thus married will never disclose the fact, but it becomes known among his relatives, who sometimes, looking for him in the place where he sleeps at night, will find that he has disappeared. They then suppose that he has gone to his wife "beneath the earth," but they will not dare speak of the matter to him. This is believed of a magician who is well known to me, and who lives in a small village in Upper Egypt. His relatives have constantly urged him to marry, since the Egyptian peasants consider it a disgrace for a man to remain a bachelor. This magician has always refused to take to himself a wife, and has turned a deaf ear to the entreaties of his family. Accordingly, they now believe that he has an *ʿafrīteh* (feminine form of *ʿafrīt*) as his wife, as sometimes he is not found sleeping on his mat at night. Since he is a Copt he cannot take a human being as a second wife, as a Muslim would be able to do in similar circumstances. Such a supernatural wife helps her husband in all his work as a magician; indeed, his powers are often attributed entirely to the assistance he receives from his wife beneath the earth.

E [581]

E 791 789

Most magicians possess books, usually manuscripts written by themselves, containing numbers of incantations for repetition, directions as to the performance of the accompanying rites, and also charms in the form of magic squares. These spells may have been in use in the magician's family for several generations, and handed down orally from father to son, but in more recent times committed to paper, now that the knowledge of writing is commoner among the villagers.

E [408]

The Coptic magician mentioned above has several such manu-

[1] *Cf.* the story of Balaam and his ass.

THE FELLĀḤĪN OF UPPER EGYPT

places his family would at once lose their position, and they would be looked down upon as nobodies. To our Western ideas such restrictions are apt to be regarded as a form of tyranny, but it is not a fair judgment. Seclusion is partly a sign of respect among Egyptians, and indicates the value that the men put upon their womenfolk. Most of the women have unfortunately a difficult and dangerous temperament, which, until they have learnt self-control, and have been inspired with higher ideals, makes them anything but an elevating influence in village society.

Though theoretically they are supposed to be entirely in subjection to the male sex, in practice they can, and often do, maintain a very firm hold on their husbands. I have known many men who are in mortal terror of their wives. Indeed, I am often inclined to think that it is the poor oppressed Egyptian *man* who has a claim to my sympathy, and that the over-ruled, oppressed wife is somewhat of a myth.

More often than not a man marries a girl from his own village, the favourite marriage being with a daughter of his father's brother. On the smallest provocation, some imagined slight, for example, a girl will run off to her father's or brother's house, and remain there until her husband, from fear of mischief being made against him in the village by his wife's relations, is induced to agree to do whatever his wife demands of him. She may require him to buy her gold earrings, a nose-ring, an anklet, or fine clothes, and, though a poor man, he may feel obliged to purchase one or more of these articles for fear of what his wife may do. Many men have run into debt for such reasons.

A man of my acquaintance, who owns a certain amount of land and is by way of being one of the rather superior people of his village, divorced his wife a year or two ago. She was quite a decent woman, but, her relations being poor, she had no land of her own, and, moreover, her husband's brother had died, bequeathing his widow a *feddān* (acre) of land and a little money. My acquaintance had his eye on this land, which was family property, belonging originally to his father, and the only way he could obtain it was by marrying his brother's widow. He did not want to have two wives, for it is expensive to keep up such an establishment; also, monogamy is becoming much more common in Egypt, and to have more than one wife is looked upon as rather barbarous even among the peasants. The only thing to do was to get rid of his first wife.

the fellaheen are mere 'creatures', in which there is no point in interesting oneself, and which it is considered good form to know nothing about. Faced with the simplest of queries about them, the rich often show an ignorance which makes it quite clear that such questions have never occured to them, and arouse no curiosity. Even the best of them, while deploring the dullness and hidebound habits of the fellah, will do nothing to help him that might lessen their own income. All this maintains the gulf between the two extremes. 565 369

There is, however, a country middle class, consisting of medium landowners. Like the smallholders, they are closely attached to the village. Conservative, gain-loving and unpretentious, they live in the country and keep a close watch on the yield of their feddans. At feasts and funerals they give generously to their poor neighbours. From this class are drawn the pupils who fill the primary and secondary schools in the provinces, the students of the religious institutes dependent on Al-Azhar, the Government employees, and a number of police officers. It has produced the great men of contemporary Egypt, such as Sheikh Mohammed Abdou, Saad Zaghloul Pasha, Nahas Pasha, and Dr Taha Hussein. 565 423 181

These patriarchal families are, however, becoming fewer and fewer. One reason is the growth of their wealth and ambition. The second generation makes its way into the higher levels, and settles in Cairo or Alexandria. This exodus from the fields was largely encouraged by the boom of 1919-20, but apart from this the westernised education of the young and the taste for European things have produced a distaste for country life. Cairo and Alexandria, during the last fifteen years, have developed considerably in size and in amenities. Every year there is a new influx of wealthy provincials from the chief towns and villages in all the mudiriyas. Villas and blocks of flats spring up everywhere and luxury shops do a thriving trade. 556 565 166

A second reason for the decay of this middle class is the splitting up of estates by inheritance, for families are large. According to Moslem Law, which is universally applicable, the sons receive two parts each to the daughter's one. It is by no means unusual to find the grandson of a man who had 40 feddans inheriting no more than one, so that he falls back to the level of the fellaheen. 565 428 423

/80 cont'd/

Nowadays there are some women who perform the Zar-ceremony (1) merely for fun or with the aim to get money or presents from their friends and relations. (2)

2. The Kūdiya or Shaikha:

In most cases the Kūdiya is a woman, rarely a man. Kūdiya with dark complexions are preferred, because it is believed that the most clever Kūdiya are Sudanese. In our terminology the Kūdiya may be described as the medium between the possessed person and the spirits. By her knowledge and ability, which will be described later, she is able to designate the spirit or /81/ spirits who entered the patient's body. A specially favourable day for the soothing of the spirit is fixed and special offerings made. The amulets (Arabic: Hegab, pl. ahgeba) and the clothes the patient must wear during the ceremony are determined. From the day the Kūdiya is called by the patient until the day of the ceremony she supervises every step taken in this respect. She has connection with the black-and goldsmiths and with the El-'Attar (plant and drug-dealer).

The Kūdiya herself is supposed to be possessed by all kinds of spirits and she wears all respective amulets. Once every year she performs a big ceremony for all these spirits. It takes place in the month of Ragab and is the closing ceremony of the year. During the following two holy months of Islam Shâban and Ramadan no Zar-ceremony may be performed. Apart from the big annual ceremony, she makes a small Zar approximately twice weekly as treatment for her patients.

The Kūdiya's position is hereditary; if she has no daughter to succeed her, the post will be passed on to one of her assistants.

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(1) It is mostly uncultured rich women who do this for fun and spend a great deal of money on it.

(2) The social usage obliges a woman even nowadays in Egypt to give presents or money (called: No q tan) to her relatives or friends on the occasion of marriage-, birth-or Zar-ceremonies. They, in turn, are obliged to repay her if she performs any such ceremonies.

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
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Upper Egypt

tion is made of her it is usually accompanied, as in the case of other unclean things, with a "saving your presence" (*essak Allah*, literally "God honour you"); with regard to inheritance she is regarded as only a half person; she is generally excluded from the mosque, and as a rule is not required to pray, or to know more than is necessary for housekeeping. Still, in the lands of Islam, as well as in the rest of the world, the weaker sex has subjected the stronger in certain fields. Here, too, there are plenty of men who are under petticoat government. The wife is significantly called *sitt*, that is, "mistress," and even the husband calls her so. The wife has even duties to perform towards the outer world in so far as she has to manage the housekeeping. When, in the absence of her husband a guest has to be entertained, meals are served up in the name of the wife through her servants or children, she inquires after the name and health of the guest, but she herself does not appear.

Her sphere of activity is entirely limited to the house, and she fulfils her mission with all the more contentment that the pleasures of the great world are unknown to her. She is not unsusceptible to the attractions of dress and finery—her sex makes this a matter of course—but she has only her husband and her female friends to shine before, and that sets a natural limit to her desires. Her longings do not go beyond her state of half freedom, to which she is accustomed from her youth up, seclusion is not regarded by her as a restraint imposed by the tyrannical men, but as a precept of morality, and a sudden edict of emancipation would at once arouse in the harem itself as much indignation and resistance as a tightening of the reins among the ladies of civilization. It is not to be denied that only in the garden of freedom can a healthy plant thrive, and come to maturity and produce fruit a thousand fold. The greenhouse plant never feels the storm, but it remains weakly and droops at the slightest breath of unaccustomed air that gains entrance from the outside by some crevice. Yet experience teaches that a goodly number of those open-air garden plants cannot stand their freedom, and perish if they do not receive strict attention and care.